



## United States Department of State

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October 27, 1982

TO:

NSC - Mr. Michael Wheeler

CIA - [redacted] 10/27

DOD - Col. John Stanford

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Subject:

Soviet Nationalities Policy Paper

Attached is the first draft of the Soviet Nationalities policy paper. This paper will be the main topic of discussion at the next meeting of the Nationalities Working Group, which will take place on Friday, October 29 at 11:30 a.m. in room 6226 of the State Department.

*L. Paul Bremer, Jr.*  
L. Paul Bremer, Jr.  
Executive Secretary

## Attachments:

1. Desired Distribution for Policy Paper.
2. Revised Membership List for Nationalities Working Group.
3. Soviet Nationalities Policy Paper.

State Dept. review completed

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SECRETU.S. Policy and Soviet NationalitiesThe Problem

In defining United States policy toward Soviet Nationalities, four basic questions must be answered. First: What is the nature of current nationalities problems within the Soviet Union -- do they pose a threat to Soviet power, and on what time scale? Second: Should the United States attempt to influence the development of ethnic and nationality problems within the Soviet Union? Third: Assuming the answer is affirmative, should our influence be directed at long-term evolutionary change, at short-term troublemaking, or at both together? Fourth: What tools does the United States have at its disposal to achieve its policy objectives, and what should it be doing with them?

Background

In the prior work of the Nationalities Working Group (1978-80), the four questions noted above were addressed in one form or another and seemed to be answered in the following manner (there was no policy document formally agreed to by all agencies). First, there was a general assumption that the current nationalities situation within the Soviet Union was one in which the problems, though potentially very significant for the Soviets, did not pose a direct threat to Soviet power. Second, there was general agreement that the United States should closely monitor the development of Soviet Nationality problems and that there might be occasions when attempts to influence those problems would prove beneficial to U.S. interests. Third, there was a general inclination to promote the rights and freedoms of Soviet national minorities, but not to undertake actions which could be construed by the Soviet authorities as direct attempts to weaken their hold over national minority areas.\* Fourth, there was general agreement that the United

\*There were, however, two major exceptions to this policy. The United States continued its non-recognition of the illegal Soviet incorporation of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. Also, the Carter Administration continued to support "Captive Nations Week," which is based on a 1959 Congressional Resolution calling among other things for the independence of the Baltic States, Ukraine, White Ruthenia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Idel-Ural, Cossackia, Turkestan and other areas within the present borders of the Soviet Union. Recent Presidential proclamations honoring the week have stressed our support for Baltic independence, but have omitted reference to other "captive" areas within the Soviet Union.

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States should seek to expand its cadre of private and government experts in Soviet national minorities questions; that it should expand its information distribution and collection efforts for Soviet national minorities, particularly with regard to radio broadcasting and publications distribution; and that it should closely examine opportunities to expand its official and unofficial presence inside the Soviet Union, particularly on national minority areas. Translation of this agreed approach into activities was significant, but imperfect. It focussed more on research and analysis than on activities designed to influence the situation.

With the advent of the Reagan Administration, and the continuing deterioration in U.S.-Soviet relations, it is fair to ask whether the general assumptions made on nationalities matters by the prior Nationalities Working Group still hold their validity, or whether they have been outpaced by changes in the U.S.-Soviet relationship and our own information about the nature of Soviet nationalities problems. Therefore, a reexamination of the four basic questions is in order.

1. What is the nature of current Nationalities problems within the Soviet Union -- do they pose a threat to Soviet power, or do they not?

There is no prospect within the next five to ten years that Soviet nationalities problems will pose or be capable of posing a direct threat to the Soviet regime. Nationalist activities within Ukraine, Georgia, Lithuania, Estonia and elsewhere do cause the Soviet leadership some minor problems, but the overwhelming power of the central authorities, their awareness of the nationalities dimension in Soviet politics, and their determination to keep nationalities problems under control are not in question, nor will they be in this period.

That said, there are important nationalities problems which could present a growing force for decentralization and could preoccupy the Soviet authorities in the not too-distant future. The general direction is important even if this is a long-term issue. For example, there are two issues, those of military manpower and labor distribution, which will pose increasingly serious problems for the regime over the next two decades. Both of these are related to the explosive growth of the Moslem nationalities and the relatively slow growth of the Slavic nationalities within the USSR. These growth patterns will result, by the turn of the century, in perhaps as much as

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one third of the Soviet Armed Forces being composed of Moslems, acute labor shortages in European Russia and substantial labor surpluses in Central Asia and perhaps the Caucasus.

Because the Moslem populations of the Soviet Union have proven even more difficult to assimilate than other national minorities due to virtually unbridgeable cultural, language, and religious differences, the Soviet authorities will be faced with a number of hard choices in the 1990s. In the economic sphere, they will have to allocate increasing resources to Central Asia to take advantage of labor surpluses there, or force Central Asians to move to European Russia or Siberia. Either course will hold the potential for exacerbating nationalist tensions and prompting a revival of Russian, as well as Central Asian, nationalism. In the military sphere, the increasing Central Asian component in the Armed Forces will lead naturally to pressure for the Russians to give up their virtual monopoly of high command positions. It could also lead to increasing attempts at "modernization," usually in the form of assimilation, i.e., Russification, of Central Asian elites and urbanization of others, to provide a more useful recruiting base. Once again, such pressures will inevitably create a greater potential for increased tension between the Russian and the Moslem nationalities.

Clearly, therefore, nationalities problems will bulk increasingly large in the calculations of the Soviet leadership throughout the next several decades. It is just as certain, however, that the central authorities will have the power to surmount any combination of likely internal problems -- barring the unforeseen, such as a general war or economic collapse. What is uncertain is whether they will have the acumen to manage the problems without debilitating (even if non-critical) frictions. Therefore, nationalities problems, while they will almost certainly not threaten a fatal weakening of the Soviet system, will turn into an even more obvious vulnerability of the Soviet system, and one which might be useful to us.

2. Should the United States attempt to influence the development of ethnic and nationality problems within the Soviet Union?

At issue here is whether and how Soviet nationality problems can be turned to U.S. advantage. While the collapse of the Soviet Empire would be in the U.S. interest, the Empire is not, as indicated above, about to collapse from internal causes and cannot be brought to the point of collapse at an acceptable cost

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through outside intervention in the immediate future. But Soviet policy toward the minority nationalities is beset with contradictions. At a minimum, U.S. policy should not help shield the Soviet leadership from the costs of these contradictions. Carefully handled, they could be used to advance U.S. interests, since a Soviet leadership which is not fundamentally sure of the loyalty of its national minorities, a leadership which in an era of growing scarcity of resources is faced with an unending succession of difficult distribution decisions, a leadership which, in short, is preoccupied with the costs and problems created by its own internal policies is not likely to be as effective a competitor for influence in other parts of the world.

3. Assuming the answer is affirmative, should our influence be directed at long-term evolutionary change, at short term troublemaking, or at both together?

There is no doubt that, in keeping with this Administration's strong support of the Helsinki Accords, actions aimed at increasing the rights and freedoms of all groups within the Soviet Union -- including the majority Russians themselves -- is a legitimate objective for U.S. nationalities policy and serves our interest in sharpening the contradictions inherent in the leadership's policies. Beyond this, however, it is also in the interest of the United States to engender within the Soviet leadership some uncertainty about the ultimate loyalty of the regime's minority nationalities, a factor which could inhibit Soviet foreign policy behavior if played correctly.

However, U.S. actions to encourage such an uncertainty must be carefully calculated, based on indirect action if possible, and founded on accurate information. Our overall policy should be cast in terms of Soviet constitutional guarantees and international agreements the Soviets have signed. We should seek to encourage diversity, pluralism, decentralization, democracy -- and independence in such specific cases as the Baltic states. We would not seek, as a matter of declaratory policy, explicitly the break-up of the Soviet Union.

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4. What tools does the United States have at its disposal to achieve its policy objectives, and what should it be doing with them? As information compiled recently by the Nationalities Working Group indicates, a good deal of progress has been made in recent years in upgrading our capabilities to gather and distribute Soviet nationalities information. However, it is equally apparent that our ability to keep tabs on the primary national minority groups could still be profitably expanded. And we need significantly to increase our capability to have an impact on the situation. One of the primary objectives of the Nationalities Working Group should be to continue to seek methods to build up these capabilities.

This is particularly true now that the Soviet authorities have mounted an increasingly severe campaign of repression against all dissenters and unauthorized information flows into and out of the Soviet Union. We will have to run harder, in the present environment, just to keep from losing ground. The President's declared intention to upgrade and modernize RFE and RL facilities is a welcome step, and vitally necessary if we are to be successful in foiling Soviet attempts to prevent an accurate picture of the world from reaching its national minorities. We will wish to consider what broadcasting policies are most likely to maximize useful U.S. influence in the short and long terms.

One fundamental way in which we could improve our knowledge of, contact with, and impact on Soviet minority groups would be through the establishment of additional U.S. Missions and the expansion of official and unofficial exchanges between the United States and the Soviet Union. It is ironic that the possibilities for such increased contacts have been severely constricted by the very factor which has led to a heightened interest in Soviet nationalities questions and Soviet vulnerabilities -- the parlous state of U.S.-Soviet relations. The Nationalities Working Group should examine the subject of U.S.-Soviet contacts more thoroughly to determine whether U.S. interests are better served by maintaining two Missions -- an Embassy and a Consulate General -- inside the USSR, or by a carefully planned expansion of our presence into the other republics.

We also need to examine how our exchanges and contacts can be expanded and shaped to give particular priority to nationalities matters. For example, we should consider how to increase our "presence" in Central Asia and with Soviet Moslems. We might reconsider the ban on exhibits in this light.

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In addition we need to look at other ways to increase religious contacts/influences as this dimension is central to many of the different nationalities situations.

It is also clear that not enough has been done in the public affairs area to enhance Western awareness of Soviet Nationalities issues and to highlight Soviet vulnerabilities and problems in this area. Two methods by which the Nationalities Working Group might be able to encourage this process would be through the sponsorship of private studies and seminars on the subject, and through the hosting of public conferences on Soviet Nationalities questions.

The plight of many Soviet human rights activists who are currently persecuted by the Soviet authorities is directly attributable to the efforts of these persons to assert their national traditions. The Nationalities Working Group should work with the appropriate public bodies, such as the CSCE Commission, Amnesty International, the American Psychiatric Association, and others to ensure that adequate attention is paid to Nationalities questions at the various human rights meetings which these groups regularly support or attend. Particular care should be taken, however, to avoid expressions of support for persons whose activities can only be construed as nationalist or separatist in character, and not human-rights related.

In general, we need to examine the level and kinds of resources devoted to understanding and influencing the nationalities situation in the Soviet Union. It is clear that more can be done, particularly on the political action front.

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